



West of the Rockies

Poetry

El Salvador, San Francisco

Salvador, for the country of his birth,
young man with liquid eyes
beaten, hanged by the wrists,
toenails pulled out, one by one,
laid on bedsprings laced with electricity.

I know him as an eager student,
busboy, dishwasher, prep person,
trying to keep a car running,
a roof over his head,
a future in his thoughts.

Today, we greet each other
on the street where I live
behind a pink Victorian
with lace curtains

and, when I ask how he's doing,
he tells me of his story of torture and escape,
shows me he still carries my card
so if he is arrested
they will know he has people.

When we get to the machine-gun death of his father,
a simple man, one who liked to drink a lot,
one who offered his body for that of his son,
we are surprised by our weeping
in the busy lunch time traffic,
next to the bank, my parked car,
mothers with babies going by.

He shows me the most visible scars,
wrist, chest, arm
and tells me sadly of his twisted toes.

I start wishing for an end, to know
how he has come to be in San Francisco,
to take a job, love a girl, carry my card
with so much horror embedded in his flesh.

I reach past myself to touch his arm,
hold his hands and, then, we go,
each to our own afternoon.

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